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India and Western Religious Thought - Christendom

The invasion of India by Alexander in 327 B.C. starts a closer interchange of thought between India and the west. In the New Academy we find a blend of the two schools of Plato and Pyrrho, and the influence of Indian thought is evident. It was one of the great moments of history when Alexander at a great banquet, prayed for a union of hearts (homonoia) and a joint Commonwealth of Macedonians and Persians. He envisaged a brotherhood of man in which there should be neither Greek nor barbarian, though his outlook was more political than ~~religious~~ spiritual. Zeno in his "Republic" showed the vision of a world which should no longer be separate States, but one great city under one divine law, where all were citizens and members one of another, bound together not by human laws, but by their own voluntary adhesion or by love. This great hope has never left us though we seem to be as far away from it as in the 3rd Century B.C. Already Zeus the traditional God, had been identified with the world God of Stoicism.

"Most glorious of immortals, Zeus all powerful,
Author of Nature, named by many names, all hail.
Thy law rules all; and the voice of the world may cry to thee
For from thee we are born, and alone of living things
That move on earth, are we created in God's

(The Oxford Book of Greek Verse in Translation). 38) pp. 533+ 5).

principles which are common to Indian & Greek mysticism; Tarn says "For in matters of the spirit, Asia was quite confident she could outstay the Greeks; and she did." (The Greeks in Bactria & India. (1938. p. 67). Again, "Indian civilization was strong enough to hold its own against Greek civilization, but except in the religious sphere, was seemingly not strong enough to influence it as Babylonia did; nevertheless we may find reason for thinking that in certain respects India was the dominant partner. "Except for the Buddha statue, the history of India would in all essentials have been precisely what it has been, had Greeks never existed." Alien in origin, alien to the spirit of Hellenism, predominantly Indian in character & content, walking in the shadow without support from the state, the Orphic, the Eleusinian, the Pythagorean brotherhoods, & Platonic schools, prepared the way for the later Platonism & for certain elements in Catholic theology.

in the circles in which the accounts of the Gospels originated. The Jewish religion can only be properly understood if its vast background is taken into account, if the Non-Semitic influences on Palestine and Syria are considered. Indian, or Indo-Iranian groups who worshipped the Vedic deities, Mitra, Varuna, Indra, and others, were found in and to the north of Syria in the middle of the Second Millennium B.C. These gods of the Rg Veda were known to the Hurrians of Mitanni, and the Hittites of Anatolia. Any interpretation of the Jewish Religion which ignores the total environment in which it grew up, would be narrow. Buddhism closed in on Palestine two centuries before the Christian Era and Buddhist influence is seen in many of the Jewish Sects — the Essenes, the Mandeans and the Nazarenes. John the Baptist was an Essene and Jesus was greatly influenced by the tenets of the Essenes. Jesus looked upon John as His Master and forerunner as the greatest among those born of woman.

The book of Enoch is a remarkable Hebrew work, written several years before the Christian era, full of non-Jewish speculations. Dr Charles thinks "that the book was composed about 80. BC." It was completed at the latest about the middle of the last century before Christ" (R. Otto - The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man). 1938 - 171). Otto finds in it "Speculations (which clearly betray their origin in an Iranian + Chaldean source) about the world and the angels and visions of the Super natural world and its mysteries."

Jupiter becomes the 'ruler and guardian of the Universe, the mind and Spirit of the world' (Seneca). The highest life of man is to live in accordance with the reason which is implanted in him as a part and pattern of the divine reason of the Universe. The soul of the individual is not immortal, for it must perish at the general conflagration which is to destroy this sensible world. The Stoics did not reject the gods of the people; they were treated as parts of the world order, "veils mercifully granted to the common man to spare his eyes the too dazzling nakedness of truth".

Alexander left behind him in India, Greek colonists and soldiers and in the North West frontiers for some centuries, Greek or Semi-Greek principalities continued. By 140 B.C. the Greeks born in India became completely Indianized. The greatest of the Indo-Greek Kings was Menander, converted to Buddhism by the Buddhist teacher Nāgasena (180-160. B.C.), his conversion being recorded in the famous work Milindapañha. With the conversion of the great Scythian King Kanishka, Buddhism entered on a second period of glory and enterprise. During this period, India and the West had extensive trade relations. Alexandria was the centre of intellectual and commercial activity because it was the meeting place of Jews, Syrians, + Greeks. Milindapañha. mentions it as one of the places to which the Indians regularly resorted.

It is probable that Indian religious ideas and legends were well known

Enoch, preaches the coming world judgement and proclaims the 'Son of Man' who was to appear in order to rule with the righteous as their head in the time of the new age. Professor Otto is emphatic that this idea of a Son of God who was also a Son of Man is "certainly not from Israel ---- The figure of a being who had to do with the world, and who was subordinate to the primary, ineffable, remote, and aboriginal deity, is of high antiquity among the Aryans. ---- It may be regarded as indubitable that the phrase, "this Son of Man" points back in some way to influences of the Aryan East." The Son of Man is also "the Elect one in whom dwells the Spirit of those who have fallen asleep in righteousness. "Few could think that anything of the kind could enter the mind of an Israelite. But on Aryan soil the conception that the soul after death enters into ishta devata goes far back into Vedic times." (Otto - p.189). Enoch is himself proclaimed the Son of Man - Michael leads him by the hand and shows him "all secrets of mercy and righteousness". Thereupon "the Spirit transported Enoch to the Heaven of heavens, where he saw the Aged One (God Himself.). Otto asks, "whence came these ideas, of which neither the prophets nor the Old Testament as a whole, had the slightest notion?", and answers: 'far off in the Indo-Aryan East, we find the clearest analogy to the process here described of Spiritual ascent, of unclothing & reclothing. (pp. 204-5). After a short statement of the Hindu view he says, "these materials are found in India in more primitive form...

not merely at a late period but in the remote pre-Christian Kaushitakai Upanisad. That such ancient Aryan conceptions had analogues in Iran is not to be doubted. That they shine through in our Book of Enoch is just as certain." (p 206.) The predicates which are attributed to Enoch's God, are those which are found in the Upanisads. Later, when Jesus calls upon us to walk in His ways, confess Him and become His personal followers, and tells us that if we succeed, each one of us can be the Son of Man, He is echoing the words of Enoch. The Son of Man is the Son of God. He is the Saviour: "He shall be a staff to the righteous whereon to stay themselves, and not fall": and he shall be the light of the Gentiles, and the hope of those that are troubled of heart. He is pre-existent from the beginning - when Jesus manifests His spiritual ~~Kingdom~~ insight by His suffering unto death, He inherits the Kingdom. He is the Son of Man and the Son of God. It is the ancient Hindu tradition which Enoch illustrates and Jesus continues.

Jesus left nothing written. The need for compiling trustworthy records of His life and Sayings was felt late in the Second Generation, and it is difficult to assume that the accounts of the evangelists are historically accurate. They have been moulded by the devotional needs and spiritual experiences of the early Christian communities. They tell us more of the faith of the Church than of what Jesus actually said and did. We find in the Gospels, not so much facts of history, as the fancies of the devout

6. "It seems, then, that the form of the earthly is no less than of the heavenly Christ is for the most part hidden from us. For all the inestimable value of the Gospels, they yield us little more than a whisper of his voice; ... we brace ie them but the outskirts of his ways. Only when we see him hereafter in his fulness shall we know him also as he was on earth. And perhaps the more we ponder the matter, the more clearly we shall understand the reason for it, and therefore shall not wish it otherwise. For probably, we are at present, as little prepared for the one as for the other." (R. H. Lightfoot, "History & Interpretations in the Gospels" (1935) P. 225).

Jesus gave form and substance to the dreams which had haunted his compatriots for generations, but in this He was greatly influenced by the Non-Jewish currents of thought and aspiration which prevailed in His circle during His time. There are legends that He travelled in the East in the period between the age of 13 and 30, about which no mention is made in the Gospels.

The Jewish Conception of the Kingdom of God differed from that held by the Hindus, Buddhists & Zoroastrians, who believed that the Kingdom of God was a life which was not of this world. The Jews, however held that man was to expect and see the Kingdom of God within the limits of his own life. The intense nationalism which they felt developed into a catastrophic view of the universe and they looked forward to a great final cataclysm by which they, the chosen people of God would be restored to their proper place. The last event

would close the history of the world, and inaugurate a new age and a new society in which Israel would be all powerful and her enemies nowhere.

There was a period in Jesus' life, when this Messianic conception was the dominant one. When He announced after His baptism by John the Baptist, "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand, Repent," His Jewish audience understood it to mean that the great Catastrophe was at hand, when the Messiah would intervene on behalf of the elect. The masses who looked for the break down of the Roman power and the establishment of the Kingdom of God, were greatly excited by Jesus' Messianic message and He was tried as a political insurgent and the death to which He was condemned was that reserved for rebels and traitors. From this nationalistic outlook Jesus' teaching gradually changed over to a universalist position. He became the Son of Man - the Suffering Servant. The Gospel tradition shows clearly this change of emphasis in Jesus' teaching & the new work served to heighten the significance of His message. The intercessory and expiative power of suffering and martyrdom is emphasized in all religions.

From the Synoptic Gospels it is clear that the two currents, the Jewish & the Mystic, the Materialistic and the Spiritual, were not perfectly reconciled in Jesus' mind. The Jewish view of the Kingdom is opposed to the conception underlying the words "My Kingdom is not of this world". The negative descriptions of eternal life

which we have in the Upanisads and the Buddhist scriptures, find their echo in Jesus' declaration that heaven and earth shall pass away, and later sayings: "It is not yet made manifest what we shall be", and "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him". These negations and contrasts suggest the reality of a world which is other than the familiar world of earth. To attain it, we have to be re born, must become as the "angels in heaven". It is not possible in an earthly form of existence, to be born into the Kingdom of Heaven. It is the wondrous new creation. Jesus used the words and feelings familiar to the people when describing this heavenly state. He spoke of sitting on thrones, and feeding on banquets and living as angels, and he realised the as we do, in a degree of these images. But His Jewish audience grasped at these symbolic descriptions and read in them the hope of a Messiah. The chief aim of the Jew was to flee from the wrath to come. He hoped and prayed that he should belong to the Kingdom of God when that wrath should descend upon him. Resurrection was the only way in which the dead could share in the Kingdom. The mystic, however, has the assurance that he has attained security and freedom here & now. If life eternal can be had here and now, there is no point in a resurrection. Professor Rudolph Otto says that "Jesus' preaching of the Kingdom contains elements which are certainly not of Palestinian origin, but point definitely to connections

with the Aryan and Iranian East". While the Messianic conception of the Kingdom belongs to the Palestinian tradition, the Mystic conception is the development of the Indian idea.

In Jesus' mind universalism and passivism conflict with the exclusiveness and militarism of his Jewish Ancestors. He moved forward from the Latter and so often came into conflict with the Jews. It is, beyond doubt that there was a stage in Jesus' life when He attained a vision of Universality and love, and meant literally that "they that take the Sword, shall perish by the Sword".

The Christian view of future life was not moulded by the Jewish or the popular Graeco-Roman conceptions. The Christian ideas of the Consciousness of Sin, division in the Mind of Man, redemption, rewards and punishments after death, must have grown up in the little known period between the Old and New Testaments.

Jesus challenged the Jewish claim to the exclusive right of entry into the Kingdom. He announced that He had come not to save the righteous, but to call Sinners to repentance. To the question, who is my neighbour? He answered: any man in trouble, whatever may be his race or Nationality. He protested vehemently against the Jews exaggerated devotion to Ceremonial details. To the Jew the important question was "What am I to do"? He insisted on a code of Conduct. To the Eastern religions and the Mystery cults, the more important Question is. "What am I to be"? The

aim is to become something different and not to do something else. Jesus taught that he must become different, change our nature, be born again. Rebirth to a higher life, superiority to the bondage of the law is emphasized by Jesus. The pathway to this rebirth, is by a life of self-control bordering on asceticism. So far as the Jewish tradition is concerned, there is little or nothing in it of an ascetic character. The main Jewish tradition accepted the uninterrupted continuance of the present world order, the doctrine of goodness of all creation, and the duty of peopling the world and reaping the fruits of the earth. In John the Baptist, in Jesus, and Paul, the new current of other worldliness emerges, and it cannot be accounted for by their Jewish background. It is interesting to know that the moral teaching of Jesus, with its ascetic and other worldly emphasis has been anticipated several hundred years by the Upanisads and Buddha. The late Professor Rhys Davids observes — "It is not too much to say that almost the whole of the moral teaching of the Gospel as distinct from the dogmatic teaching, will be found in Buddhist writings several centuries older than the Gospels. - - - - - And the coincidence is not only in the matter; it extends to the manner also, in which these doctrine are put forward. Like the Christ, the Buddha was wont to teach in parables and to use homely figures of speech; and many of the sayings attributed to him are strangely like some of

of those found in the New Testament."
(Journal of the Pali Text Society: 1923. pp 43-4)

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12 as a dove descending into him; and a voice
came out of the heavens, Thou art my
beloved son, in thee I am well pleased."
The Christian Eucharist perpetuates the
Sacred Meal of the cults of Eleusis and Mithra."

As a Jew, Jesus recognized a corporeal
resurrection. There is immediate entrance into
blessed fellowship with God. The moment of
death is the moment of exaltation. We need
not confuse the Spirit of man with his fleshly
covering. Victory over death is the awakening
of the spirit from the slumber, that which
makes it capable of a higher vision. The
Christian view, that this life is a period of
education and testing, and we are sojourners
in a strange land where we must not expect
to see full satisfaction for the deepest
interests of life, is not accepted by the orthodox
Jew or the normal Greek. The conviction of
the exaltation to God through death does not
seem to be a question of an empty grave or
bodily resurrection. The simple story of the life
and activity of Jesus was transformed into
an epiphany of a heavenly being who had
descended to earth and concealed Himself
in robes of flesh. The picture of Jesus of the later
Christology blurred the contours of the Spiritual
God. The Risen Lord takes the place of God
and the Church replaces His Kingdom.

Jesus in His teaching of the Kingdom
of God, life eternal, ascetic emphasis and
even future life, breaks away from the
Jewish tradition and approximates to
Hindu and Buddhist thought. It is probable
that Jesus was helped considerably by
His religious environment, which included

Indian influence. The Gospel story bears a striking resemblance to the life and teaching of Gautama the Buddha.

Nearly 500 years before Jesus, Buddha went round the Ganges Valley proclaiming a way of life which would deliver men forever from the bondage of ignorance and sin. He was miraculously conceived and wondrously born. According to the Majjhima Nikāya (123) "The angels who received the babe held him before his mother, saying, "All joy be to thee, queen Māyā rejoice and be glad for this child thou hast borne is holy." His greatness is proclaimed by the Brahmin priest Asita who corresponds to the Jewish Simeon. Buddha steadily grew in wisdom and stature and when he found no satisfaction in the life by which he was surrounded, he resolved to flee from the joys of his home. Early in his career, after a fast of 49 days, he was tempted by Māra to give up his quest for truth in return for the promise of world dominion. Buddha overcomes the temptations, persists in his search, meditates for days and wins enlightenment, which is marked by 32 great miracles. The blind receive their sight, the deaf hear & the lame walk freely. Buddha himself is transfigured. He sets forth on his mission to "establish the kingdom of righteousness, to give light to those enshrouded in darkness, and open the gate of immortality to men." He has 12 disciples whom he sends out to carry his message among all classes of men. He heals the sick. Good conduct & good belief are insisted upon. Once his teachings are accepted, all other distinctions of caste and status are lost. The following sayings of Buddha find their echo in the Gospels ——

"He abused me, he beat me,
Overcame me, robbed me:
In those who harbour such thoughts
Their anger is not calmed.
Not by anger are angers
In this world ever calmed.
By meekness they are calmed.
(~~Majjhima Nikāya, 26~~). (S. B. E Vol ~~IX~~ X. pt. I. Pg)

Again:—

Ibid. p58.
Also Majjhima
Nikaya. 21.

"Let one conquer wrath by meekness.
Let one conquer wrong by goodness.
Let one conquer the mean man by a gift
And a liar by the truth.

Dhammapada
201. 184. 185, 399.

Victory breedeth anger,
For in pain the vanquished lieth.
Lieth happy the man of peace
Renouncing victory and defeat.

Let the wise man do righteousness.
A treasure that others can share not.
Which no thief can steal:
A treasure which passeth not away.

Compare Matthew vi 19 & 20 — "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and thieves break through & steal:
But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal."

Both Buddha & Jesus bid their disciples lay up for themselves a Treasure which neither moth nor rust would corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal. Just as Buddha condemns the gloomy ascetic practices which prevailed in Ancient India, Jesus goes beyond John the Baptists emphasis on observances and ascetic ~~rigidity~~ rites. Many of the parables are common. In Jātaka 190 we read the story of an eager disciple who

finds no boat to take him across and so walks on the water. In the middle the waves rise and he loses his faith and begins to sink. When he reassures himself with faith in the Buddha, he goes safely to the other side. Max Müller remarks that mere walking on the water is not an uncommon story, but walking by faith & sinking for want of it can only be accounted for by some historical fact or transference, "and in this case we must remember that the date of the Buddhist parable is chronologically anterior to the date of the Gospel of St. Luke. Garbe assumes direct borrowing from Buddhism in the matter of Simeon, temptations, and the miracles of walking on the water, and loaves and fishes. We have many parallels between Kṛṣṇa and Christ. (1) A marvellous light envelops Mary when Christ is born. A similar light envelopes Devaki before Kṛṣṇa is born. (2) There is universal gladness of nature at their birth. (3) Herod inquires of the wise men "Where is he that is born King of the Jews"? (Matthew ii 4). Nārada warns Kaṁsa that Kṛṣṇa will kill him (Harivaṁśa ii 56). (4) Herod is mocked by the wise men. (Matthew ii 16). and Kaṁsa is mocked by the demon that takes the place of Yaśoda's infant child. (5) The massacre of the infants is found in both. (6) Joseph came with Mary to Bethlehem to be taxed; Nanda came with Yaśoda to Mathura to pay tribute. (7) The flight into Egypt is similar to that into Braj.

To love one's enemies, to bless them that curse, to do good to them that hate; to turn the other cheek, to give all to him who asks, which are the teachings of Jesus, are precepts not only taught, but practised

in their extreme rigour by the ~~Buddhists~~ 31
Buddha in his many lives according to
the Jātakas. Both Buddha & Christ in
the Spirit of the Upanisads, demand the
death or the sacrifice of the immediate
Natural existence as the condition of the
new richer life.

The curious may find matter for reflection
in the lives of the two teachers. Professor
J. Estlin Carpenter writes: "The lives of
the teachers do not essentially differ.
It was the mission of both to awaken men
out of a state of spiritual indifference, to
kindle within them a love of righteousness,
to comfort the sorrowful, to reprove as well
as to redeem the guilty." Each of these teachers
had his own tradition & grew out of it. This
fact leads to certain deep differences beneath
the resemblances. Buddha looked upon the
Absolute as super-personal Spirit, while for
Jesus it is a personal God. The theistic
emphasis which is very natural in Judaism
is lacking in the teaching of Buddha. Apart
from the redemptive power of suffering, the
special feature of dogmatic Christianity - that
the world has been saved by the death of Jesus,
has nothing like it in Buddhism. As for the
resemblances, other causes than borrowing
may be assigned. If religion is the natural
outcome of the human mind, it would be
strange if we did not find coincidences.
The hopes and fears of men, their desires and
aspirations are the same on the banks of
the Ganges, as on the shores of the Lake of
Galilee. The same examples and modes of
illustration are employed probably because
they are both members of an agricultural
society. If both taught in parables, it is
because it is the easiest form of teaching

"The Obligations of the New Testament to Buddhism - 19th Century. 1880. p. 975. Also N. J. Edmunds, "Buddhist & Christian Gospels". (1908).

simple men - Making allowance for all these, it is not easy to account for the illustration of two careers with the same legends and embellishments. They cannot be traced to natural evolution, nor can they be accounted for as due to accident. But those who are trained in European culture find it somewhat irksome to if not distasteful to admit the debt of Christian religion to non Christian sources, especially Hindu & Buddhist. "In these cases" Max Muller writes, "our natural inclination would be to suppose that the Buddhist stories were borrowed from our Christian sources & not vice versa. But here the conscience of the Scholar comes in. Some of these stories are found in the Hīnayāna Buddhist Canon & date, therefore, before the Christian era. In his "Christian Origin" E.T. (1906) p 226, Otto Pfleiderer says "These (Buddhist) parallels to the Childhood stories of Luke are too striking to be classed as mere chance: some kind of historical connexion must be postulated." It is not unnatural to suspect that some of the prominent ideas travelled from the older to the younger System. As Christianity arose in a period of eclecticism, it is not impossible for it to have adopted the outlook & legends of the older religion, especially as the latter were accessible at a time when intercourse between India & the Roman Empire was quite common. When Christianity entered the Roman Empire, different streams met, producing many strange eddies of belief & practice.

During the reign of Augustus, Trajan, & Marcus Aurelius, the

8. Contacts between India and the west were more frequent. Indian princes sent embassies to Rome & the Kusan kings were on excellent terms with Rome. The names of the various imported products — Camphor, Sulphur, beryl, opal and the like, show the linguistic influence of India. According to Ptolemy & Dion Cassius, Indians were found in that great emporium of learning — Alexandria. Apparently Dion Chrysostom was aware of the epic Mahābhāratha and its resemblance in some of its episodes to the Iliad. India had a reputation for high philosophy and religion in the middle of the 2nd century A.D: for Lucian makes Demetrius the Greek philosopher, give up his property & depart for India, there to end his life among the Brahmins. Clement of Alexandria knew the distinction between Hinduism & Buddhism. St. Jerome (AD 340) mentions Buddha by name and quotes the tradition of his virgin birth. In the reign of Constantine, Metrodorus is said to have ~~journ~~ journeyed to India to study the science & philosophy of the Hindus. Indian embassies continued to be sent to Constantine Julian & Justinian. In astronomy & geography the Indians owed a great deal to western Science.

The vast development of material prosperity in the Roman Empire had no spiritual purpose behind it. Hellenism had weakened the hold of national religions but stimulated thought & curiosity. The worship of the Caesars developed the civic virtues & the

the worship of Isis, satisfied the highly 37
cultured. The people were therefore attracted
by the Eastern cults which were streaming
into the Empire along the main highways
that linked Europe and the Eastern
provinces of the Empire, the cults of Isis,
or Mithras, Jesus or the Orphic mysteries....
To the men who were dying of despair it
seemed to be a vision of reality by which
the world can be saved. It filled the aching
void in their soul & dissipated despair.
"With all their quackeries," Professor Gwatkin
says, "these Eastern worships answered
the craving for a higher life & for the
communion with the unseen powers in a
way which the old unspiritual worship of
the State could not." They pointed to the
need of a wider fellowship than that of
the State, a richer life than that of the
good citizen. They drew the attention of
thinking men to the tragedy of the
failure of mere humanism, to the depths
of man's longing for the eternal.

The Knowledge of God. Vol. II pp. 143 ff.

Mithraism was the first officially recognised monotheistic cult of the Roman world. Mithras is the god of light, the representative of deity upon earth, the mediator between the high powers of heaven and the human race. His followers adopted an elaborate system of sacraments and degrees of initiation to secure spiritual blessings and enlightenment.

Manichaeism began in the Persian Empire of the Sassanids. It was founded by Mani, who was born in A.D. 215 on Babylonian territory & promulgated a

Creed which was a blend of Zoroastrian dogmas and Gnostic teaching. It held up an ascetic ideal of celibacy, poverty, and fasting. Mani gave a large place to the teaching of Jesus which caused him to be accepted as a Christian heresiarch. His creed forbade the worship of images, and the ~~killing of~~ killing of animals for sacrifice, and so provoked the wrath of the Roman Emperors. It became Buddhist in China and Christian in Europe.

Isis, the mother goddess, formed in Ancient Egypt one of the trinity Osiris, Isis, and Horus. She was identified with many other local goddesses, Ceres, Venus and Diana. An Oxyrhynchus papyrus (No 1380.) assigned on grounds of script to the early second century A.D. gives us a long invocation to Isis, equates her with Maia (Maya) in India and makes her mistress of the Ganges. About the rise of Christianity she had become the centre of an elaborate cult of mysticism, & reappears in Christianity as the Virgin Mother.

In Alexandria, which was the meeting place of East and West, Philo developed his new interpretation of the Jewish scriptures. It is the most systematic attempt to combine Jewish teaching with Hellenic ideas, to express the religious conceptions of the Jewish prophets in the language of the Greek philosophers. The central and the determining feature of Philo's teaching is the doctrine of the Logos. The Therapeutae or the contemplative monks of Egypt of whom Philo speaks with great enthusiasm, represent a blend of Alexandrian Judaism and Hindu beliefs and modes of life. Dean Mansel finds "in their ascetic life, in their mortification of the body & their devotion to pure contemplation, the influence of Hindu and Buddhist

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thought. (The Gnostic Heresies of the 1st & 2nd Centuries) 1875. p. 32). Philo's interpretations of Jewish Scriptures may seem forced but they set forth a doctrine of mystic philosophy - The Absolute which is beyond personality and definite existence, is distinct from God who makes and sustains the world. Philo says "He is full of Himself & sufficient to Himself - equally before and after the creation of the Universe - The Absolute God head which is perfect, self existent and self sufficient, cannot come into contact with matter; and yet Philo says that out of matter, "God generated all things, not touching it Himself for it was not right ~~and wise~~ for the wise and blessed to come in contact with indeterminate and mixed matter; but He used the incorporeal powers, whose real Name is Ideas, that the fitting form might take possession of each genus." In mediating the relation between the god head & the universe, Philo develops his conception of the Logos and the intermediate powers. The Logos is the pervasive law of the universe, the supreme idea impressed on it. As the Idea of Ideas, the most general thought, it is said to be the oldest of things. As thought it is conceived as produced under the figure of a Son. Sometimes in Philo the Logos is identified with wisdom; the mediating power is symbolized as the Mother of the Universe, the Sakti of Saiva and Sakta Systems of thought.

Man's material body is the source of evil. By resistance to the allurements of the senses and the active exercise of virtue, man can free himself from bondage to the body, and attain the divine vision when "he is lifted above and out of himself." The

"The Knowledge of God is attained by a vision, the direct personal communion of a soul that no longer reasons and reflects, but feels and knows, becomes utterly passive as in the condition of trance of which Philo had personal experience. He says "One must first become God — which is impossible — in order to be able to comprehend God. If one will die to the mortal life and live the immortal, he will perhaps see what he has never seen. But even the sharpest vision will be unable to see the Uncreated, for it will first be blinded by the piercing splendour and the rushing torrent of rays, just as fire affords light to those who stand at a proper distance, but burns up those who come near." We have in Philo's System a mystic rendering of historical Judaism. His passion for God, the certainty that the pure in heart shall see Him, the conviction that ascetic training alone can lead us to His presence, and his universality make him one of the greatest of the mystics. Dean Milman, in his "History of Christianity", writes — "It might almost seem that there subsisted some secret and indelible congeniality, some lateral consanguinity, between the caste divided populations on the shores of the Ganges, and the same artificial state of society in the valley of the Nile. It is certain that the genuine Indian Mysticism first established a permanent western settlement in the deserts of Egypt. Its first combination seems to have been with the Egyptian Judaism of Alexandria, and to have arisen from the dreamy Platonism which in the schools of that city had

-principle independent of God by which His Creative energy is thwarted and limited is posited. Evil which is opposed to the divine being has no reality. Evil is regarded as a part of the Constitution, something organic. (3) The infinite principle communicates with the finite by a series of successive Emanations. They sink gradually lower & lower in the scale as they are farther removed from their source, until at last contact with matter becomes possible & creation ensues. (4) The Cosmos is a blend of divine & non-divine material principles. It represents the descent of Spirit into Matter. That which was previously insensible is animated into life & activity by the descent of the Spirit into it. (5) Deliverance of Spirit from its union with matter or the world of Sensuality is effected by asceticism & contemplation leading to gnosis or wisdom. (6) Gnosis does not mean intellectual knowledge or logical understanding, but is seeing God, mysterious wisdom. (7) The perfect Gnostic is the man who is free from the world and master of himself. He is emancipated from the dead letter & outward symbols of religion, having realized the truth. Harnack is undoubtedly correct in looking on the Gnostics as "the theologians of the first Century." In the early days Gnosticism supplied a philosophy which Christianity lacked. The Gnostic conceptions of dualistic theology, ascetic ethics, ecstatic experience of the real, and redemption from the bonds of flesh are derived from the Eastern cults. The first attempts at the intellectual comprehension (of the Christian doctrine), the first

from them
hath matter becomes [illegible] is a blend of [illegible] It represents the [illegible] matter which

(1 23 been engrafted on the Mosaic institutes. 45

The mystic tradition is preserved in the Jewish Kabbala, whose two chief books are Sepher Yetzirah or the Book of Creation, and Zohar, or Light. This system admits the reality of an En Soph which is the highest unity, having no attributes or attributes, altributes and no definite form of existence, though it comprehends within itself all existence. Many features of the Kabbala such as the potency assigned to letters, the use of charms and amulets, the theory of emanation as opposed to creation, ex nihilo, the doctrine of the correspondence between macrocosm and microcosm, belief in rebirth, and a definite pantheistic tendency, are alien to the spirit of orthodox Judaism and akin to that of the Upanisads and Taoism.

Gnosticism was a deliberate attempt to fuse Greek (Platonic) and Hindu elements. It existed long before the Christian era though Christianity tended to look upon it as heresy. Many of the chief features of Gnosticism are those common to the Upanisads and mystic traditions of Greece. (1) The divine being is indefinable and infinite, exalted above all thought and expression. He is different from the Demiurge or the Creator God. God is separated from His attributes, the aeons of reason and truth. He is eternal silence. (2) If God is the absolute being, how do creation & evil arise? If the world arose out of the sole act of God without any modifying or opposing influence, evil would have been impossible; or we will be driven to the conclusion that God created evil. So an antagonistic

efforts of dogma were based on a
~~Phoo~~ philosophy profounder and far
more venerable than the juvenile wisdom
of the Greeks. Gnosticism is not pure
Hellenism, it is rather pure orientalism in
a Hellenic mask. The chief doctrine on
this subject is the Philosophumena or the
Refutation of all Heresies by Hippolytus,
bishop of Ostia, belonging to the early part
of the 3rd century. The author of this
work gives an account of Indian thought.
The Brahmins are divided ~~into~~ by him
into two orders, the house holders and the
ascetics who live in ~~seclusion~~ seclusion and
eat only fruits. They designated God under
the figure of light, not that of sun or of fire,
but of the inward reason, the Logos which
finds its expression in the knowledge of the
wise. We can attain to this wisdom by
casting off all vain opinion & controlling
our evil passions (1-21).

The Hermetic tradition of Egypt may be
regarded as Gnostic in character. The Hermetic
Societies grew up in hellenized Egyptian circles
where Syncretistic cults were the fashion.
The latest editor of the Hermetic books observes:
"If one were to try to sum up the Hermetic
teaching in one sentence, I can think of
none that would serve the purpose better
than the Sentence, "Blessed are the pure
in heart for they shall see God." Professor
Sir Petrie Flinders gives 200 B.C. as the
date of the Hermetic books. He sees in
them "the development of religious thought
in Egypt under Persian and Indian
influences which formed a basis of later
Jewish & Greek developments." (Egypt & Israel
(1923) p. 113).

26. They believed in a Supreme Creator God & many subordinate Gods and angels. The Lord and Maker of all from Himself made the second God, the visible & perceptible whom He loved as His Son. The vision of God is attained not through ordinary natural processes but through dreams & divination. It is ordinarily accompanied by ecstatic experiences. "Father," the disciple cries, "God has given me a new being, and I perceive things now not with bodily eyesight but by the working of the mind. I am in heaven & in earth, in water and in air: I am in beasts and in plants..... I am present everywhere. Father, I see the whole & myself in the mind." The following is a typical prayer — "we give thanks to Thee, Most High, for by Thy grace we received this light of knowledge. Having been saved by Thee, we rejoice that Thou didst show Thyself to us wholly, that Thou didst deify us in our mortal bodies by the vision of Thyself." The whole duty of man in the Hermetic writings is declared to be "to Know God and injure no man."

Plutarch is a cultivated Gnostic of the 1st century of a tolerant frame of mind. He believed in a dualism & speaks with respect of the Persian doctrine of Ormuzd & Ahriman. There are two principles hostile to each other. Plutarch believes in the re birth of Souls. The Supreme God ~~lead~~ head-rules through subordinate powers. In the development of his views he was influenced by Greek thought & Egyptian religion.

Apollonius of Tyana is another famous Gnostic. According to the account of Philostratus he journeyed to India and spent about four months at "the monastery of the wise men." Apollonius hated bloody sacrifices & was a strict vegetarian. He was a complete passivist, holding that we have no right to shed blood under any circumstances. He insisted on prayer & contemplation & tried to make men more religious, attempting to alter their ways of worship. Freedom from possession & needs is the highest value.

Basilides in the ~~2nd~~ 1st half of the 2nd century AD, works Hindu & Buddhist thought into a Christian framework. He posits the reality of a supreme godhead who is above space, time, consciousness & even being itself. It is to be worshipped in silence. His conception of God has little in common with the Christian view. Though Basilides believes that Christianity has the main factor of his system, there is no doubt that his interpretation of Christianity is profoundly Buddhist.

Valentinus has the reputation of being the greatest of the Gnostics. To the Nameless being of Basilides he gives the Name of Depth. He represents the absolute first principle as unspeakable Depth or Unutterable Silence. Its first manifestation is thought preparatory to action. Then comes Speech. Material existence is an error, fall or degradation.

Theodotus became the leader of the Eastern Valentinians & Clement was

familiar with his writings. He taught that Christ came, not for our redemption alone, but for healing the disorders of the whole world. All those who receive Him & in so far as they can receive Him, will be saved. He believed that there are different kinds of souls — those who have flesh & not soul, will perish like the beasts; those who are spiritual are predestined to life eternal. Between these are the psychic, the feminine souls who can win eternal life by faith & discipline.

Bardesanes the Babylonian (born at Edessa on 11 July A.D. 155) is credited with a work on Indian thought. He distinguishes between the Brahmins & the Buddhists. He seems to have learnt a good deal about the teaching & mode of life of Hindu & Buddhist thinkers: his work was used by porphyry.

Marcion assumes three principles: (1) The Supreme God. (2) The Demiurge. & (3) eternal matter - The two latter are imperfect but not essentially evil. He denies any real assumption by Christ of human nature. Jewish prophecy is not for him a preparation for Christian revelation. He required the Church to reject the Old Testament & thus release it from doctrinal narrowness.

Gnosticism was one of the most powerful currents of thought which influenced Christianity - in doctrine & practice, and remained a power down to the 5th century through its alliance with Neo-Platonism.

29. The Gnostics approach the problem from a non Christian point of view and arrive therefore at a Non-Christian solution. But they accept the Christian Creed and look upon themselves as Christians. But their teaching was condemned as a heresy. The Gnostic view of creation is opposed to the Christian view as set forth in the first article of the Apostles Creed: "I believe in God the Father almighty, the Maker of heaven and earth." For the Gnostics creation is not the act of the Supreme God but of an inferior demiurge. The God of religion & the god of creation are distinguished. The doctrine of the resurrection is opposed to the Gnostic view which separates Spirit & body. To the careful Student the close similarity between the teaching of the Upanisads & early Buddhism & Gnostic theories will be obvious. Matter in his ("Histoire Critique des Gnosticisme) says that "the Seeds of the Gnosis were originally of Indian origin, carried so far westward by the influence of Buddhist- that Buddhistic movement which had previously overspread all the East, from Tibet to Ceylon. C. W. King in his "The Gnostics & their remains Ancient & Mediaeval" says "In the history of the church it is most certain that almost every notion that was subsequently denounced as heretical can be traced up to Indian Speculative philosophy as its genuine fountain head; how much that was allowed to pass current for orthodox had really flowed from the same source; it is neither expedient nor decorous now to inquire." (p xv)

Among the predecessors of Plotinus may be mentioned Posidonius and Numenius.

Posidonius, the teacher of Cicero was greatly influenced by the learning of the Chaldeans & through his advocacy, astrology became a popular study. The theory of jovial, mercurial & Saturnine tempers, & lunatic & possession by demons, magic, and sorcery, began to spread & were not discouraged by the Gnostic & Neo Platonic speculations who themselves were influenced by theories of demons & spiritual agencies. But Plotinus reinterpreted the ideal of philosophic unity and transformed the "return of the Soul" from the domain of astral myths to that of experience. The teaching of Posidonius was much too Stoic in its texture & so could not satisfy an age which demanded a more spiritual conception of God and the Soul.

Eusebius. Numenius whose influence on Plotinus was considerable, "had directed all his efforts towards a fusion of Pythagoras & Plato, while seeking for a confirmation of their philosophical doctrines in the religious doctrines of the Brahmins, the Magi, & the Egyptians." He looked upon Moses as a prophet & called Plato "a Moses speaking in Attic". He distinguished the Demiurge from the Supreme Being & identified it with Logos. Our world is the third god. He believed in two world Souls – one good, the other bad. The two souls are in conflict both in man & in the world. He adopts the theory of rebirth.

In the Neo Platonism of Plotinus (A.D 205 - 270) we have the fruits of the religious syncretism which arose from the Conquests of Alexander the Great & the under-taking of the Roman Empire. It revived the mystic traditions of the Greek cults

and its resemblances not only to Alexandrian 61
Judaism but to Vedanta philosophy are
well known. Ritter introduces his account
of Neo Platonic philosophy with the general
title, "Diffusion of Oriental modes of Thought
among the Greeks". Vacherot, Zeller and
Brehier are convinced of Indian influence on
Neoplatonism.

Plotinus the founder of the Neoplatonic
School, was anxious to be instructed in
Indian philosophy & with that object he
accompanied the expedition of Gordian
against Sapor, King of Persia in A.D. 242,
though Gordian's death in Mesopotamia
turned him back half way. The chief
points of Neoplatonism are — (1) The original
essence is pure being and absolute causality.
(2) It is also the good in so far as everything
finite is to find its aim in it & flow back
into it. (3) It has no attributes at all:
it is a being without magnitude, without
life, without thought. (4) It is some thing
above existence & above goodness, and at
the same time an operative force without
any substratum. (5) As operative force it is
continually begetting some thing else without
itself being changed or moved or diminished.
(6) The first principle is perfect Self Sufficiency.
Creation is not a physical process but an
emanation. The theory of emanation is
distinguished from Creation. The distinction
is similar to that between Vivarta or
appearance, and parinama or modification.
When Plotinus insists on the hypothesis of
emanation & the Advaita Vedanta
suggests the Vivarta view, both are

axioms to make out that there is no dis- 63
-emption of the higher principle. God does not disperse Himself in individual things or natural things. The primal One produces the universal Nous, that is one with the Intelligible. The Nous produces the Soul, which in turn produces all other existences. It is a logical order of causation, not an order in time. Plotinus traces the idea of the causal series to Plato, for whom he says. the Demiurgus is Nous which is produced by the Good-beyond thought & being, which in its turn produces Soul. The Taittiriya Upanisad makes out that the human soul is a replica of the world, & contains the different principles of matter, life, consciousness, intelligence, & spiritual bliss. Plotinus affirms that in the Soul are included the principles of unity, of pure intellect, of vital power & of matter itself. It touches every grade of value & existence. The Soul can retrace the process of its descent from the divine status, become delivered from corporeality altogether, & be restored to its unity with the absolute One itself. "Nothing that has real value can perish". The world of Spirit, the kingdom of values, is secure and cannot suffer any final defeat. No noble life can be extinguished by death. The Soul exists in its own right. Plotinus interprets resurrection not as awakening with the body but as an awakening from it. With regard to eternal life, Plotinus tells us that the Souls of the departed dwell in God. where is reality and true being. He also believes in rebirth. For him even animals have Souls. He admits the

law of Karma when he says it is a universal principle that each soul after death, goes where it longs to be. "Those who have exercised their human faculties are born as men. Those who have lived only the life of the senses, as lower animals.

The Super rational is the goal of all effort & the ground of all existence. The knowledge we gain by thought is only an intermediate stage between sense perception and super rational intuition. The intelligible forms are not the highest; they are the media by which the influences of the formless essence are communicated to the world. The highest reality does not constitute thought but is presupposed & earnestly sought after by man as the unknowable ground of his thought. Man does not live by bread alone or by knowledge alone. Even intellect has a certain duality. Beyond thought & the being, is the absolute unity that is simply identical with itself. This is other than all being, though the source of it & that to which all beings aspire.

Three types of men may achieve the good & obtain a vision of truth — the philosopher, the musician & the lover. Having reached the goal ~~sobo~~ for which it has been striving, the mind becomes quiescent & unified. The highest mode of subjective life is the complete unification in which even thought disappears. Within the soul, at its very centre, is the supreme unity beyond even self knowledge. He who attains to a direct contact with reality becomes himself divine. The soul is then in a condition of complete passivity & rest, a state of intense concentration & complete forgetfulness of all things.

It then sees God the Source of life, the principle of being. It enjoys the highest blessedness & is bathed in the light of eternity. "And this is the life of gods & of godlike and happy men."
Neoplatonism like the Upanisads has faith in a higher revelation to man in mystical experience. Even in the Spirit of the Upanisads which lay more stress on Jñana, wisdom Contemplation, than on Karma or action, Plotinus regards action as an enfeebled product of contemplation. Like all mystic systems, Neo Platonism rose above the political limits of nations & states. He has many points in common with the Gnostics. The Supreme being is beyond existence. The soul which has lost its way must return home to God. But he criticizes the Gnostics for their pessimism in their views about the visible world & their impiety in not admitting that the sun and stars are the abodes of God. Plotinus defends polytheism, which the Gnostics are said to deny. Plotinus also advances a theory of God which excludes all Knowledge of God, answering to the impersonal Brahman of the Upanisad, a doctrine of Nous, corresponding to the personal Isvara & a conception of world Soul similar to the hypothesis of Hiranyagarbha. Shutfield maintains that "Indian mystical thoughts passed over into Africa & western Europe" & "blossomed forth in Plotinus" and passed into Christian thought through the "monk mystic & theosophical Pantheist, the so-called Dionysius the Areopagite." (Mysticism & Catholicism)

35. Porphyry (AD. 230 – 300) popularized the teaching of Plotinus. For him the aim of philosophy is the salvation of the Soul. Strict ~~asetism~~ asceticism is enjoined by him because he believes that the source of evil is in the desires of the soul. He advocates abstinence from animal food. His polemic against Christianity is doctrinal. He disagreed with the Christian view of the Creation & thought the hypothesis of bodily resurrection queer & impossible. He put in a strong plea for image worship in which he says — "Images and temples of the gods, have been made from all antiquity for the sake of forming reminders to men. Their object is to make those who draw near them think of God thereby, or to enable them, after ceasing from their work, to address their prayers & vows to him. When any person gets an image or a picture of a friend, he certainly does not believe that the friend is to be found in the image, or that his members exist inside the different parts of the representation. His idea rather is that the honour which he pays to his friend finds expression in the image. And while the sacrifices offered to the gods do not bring them any honour, they are meant as a testimony to the good will and gratitude of the worshippers." (Quoted in Harnack. "Expansion of Christianity" Vol I. P. 376.).

Iamblichus who died in the reign of Constantine about AD 330, was

considerably influenced by Pythagoras Plato & Plotinus. He lived at a time when the collapse of the ancient world was imminent & life tended to be oppressive & futile, & Man felt an increased sense of unworthiness. He taught that man could obtain unification with the Central Source not by his own efforts but by theurgic practices which must be performed correctly. Mystical exercises & even magical ceremonies as expounded by Iamblichus got into the Christian church and practice.

Proclus (A.D 416 - 85) was the most original thinker after Plotinus. His work is the culmination of the Speculative movement extending over five centuries whose direction was motived by speculative & religious interests. Proclus aimed not only at developing a single philosophy which combined all that was best in Pythagoras, Plato & Aristotle, but also at providing a scheme of salvation which will meet the supreme religious need of the later Hellenic period. Proclus says that the philosopher ought not to observe the religious customs of one city or country only but ought to be of the common hierophant of the whole world.

Neoplatonism was originally regarded as a dangerous adversary to Christianity & by a decree of the Council of Ephesus (431) & by a law of Theodosius II. (448) Porphyry's books were ordered to be burned. Neoplatonism was taught in Athens and at Alexandria in the beginning of the 5th Century by Hypatia. Both schools followed the

tradition of Iamblichus & through him Porphyry & Plotinus. The murder of Hypatia put an end to the tradition in Alexandria and the school of Athens was closed by Justinian in A.D 529. But Christian theology early absorbed the spirit of Neo Platonism. The thoughts of Plotinus were revived by Boethius & his spirit inspires the writings of Scotus Erigena and Eckhart. At the Renaissance, Neo Platonism again became popular.